

VOC FOR IOP/FI!
BACKGROUND NO. 1-0878
CHARLES MEDD

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MERGED UNIONS LOOK SOUTH

ANNCR:

ONE OF THE LARGEST UNION MERGERS IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN LABOR TAKES PLACE IN WASHINGTON THIS WEEK (JUNE 3). THE AMALGAMATED CLOTHING WORKERS AND THE TEXTILE WORKERS OF AMERICA, WITH A COMBINED MEMBERSHIP OF OVER HALF A MILLION, WILL SOON BEGIN A MAJOR ORGANIZING DRIVE THAT WILL AGAIN TEST THE STRENGTH OF THE SOUTHERN TEXTILE INDUSTRY, CHARLES MEDD HAS A BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE OLDEST MASS PRODUCTION INDUSTRY IN THE UNITED STATES IS TEXTILE MANUFACTURING. WHAT BEGAN IN THE SMALL NORTHERN MILL TOWNS OF NEW ENGLAND SHORTLY AFTER INDEPENDENCE HAS BECOME AN INDUSTRIAL GIANT WITH NEARLY ONE MILLION PRODUCTION WORKERS, MOST OF THEM TODAY EMPLOYED IN THE SOUTH. THE BIG COMPANIES MOVED TO THE REGION SHORTLY AFTER WORLD WAR TWO, ATTRACTED BY TAX INCENTIVES, LOW WAGE STANDARDS AND STATE LAWS THAT DISCOURAGE UNION ORGANIZING.

THE SOUTHERN TEXTILE INDUSTRY, WITH HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF POTENTIAL UNION MEMBERS, HAS LONG PRESENTED AN INVITING TARGET TO AMERICAN LABOR. BUT YEARS OF INTENSE ORGANIZING ACTIVITY HAVE YIELDED ONLY A HANDFUL OF UNION CONTRACTS AT SCATTERED PLANTS, AND NONE AT ALL AT WHAT LABOR SEES AS ITS NUMBER ONE FOE, THE J.P. STEVENS COMPANY, THE NATION'S SECOND LARGEST TEXTILE PRODUCER.

IN 1963, THE TEXTILE WORKERS UNION LAUNCHED A MAJOR CAMPAIGN TO ORGANIZE THE EIGHTY-FIVE PLANTS RUN BY STEVENS THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH. BUT AFTER THIRTEEN YEARS AND DOZENS

OF LAW SUITS, UNION VICTORIES HAVE BEEN CONFINED TO THE COURTROOM. DESPITE SEVERAL LEGAL JUDGEMENTS THAT HAVE COST THE COMPANY MUCH EMBARRASSMENT AND MORE THAN ONE MILLION DOLLARS IN FINES FOR VIOLATING NATIONAL LABOR LAWS, J.P. STEVENS REMAINS TODAY A NON-UNION COMPANY.

LIKE OTHER SOUTHERN TEXTILE FIRMS, STEVENS ARGUES THAT EMPLOYEES SHARE MANAGEMENT'S DISLIKE FOR UNIONIZATION. BUT THE TEXTILE WORKERS BLAME THIS ON COMPANY INTIMIDATION, INCLUDING THE REPEATED FIRING OF UNION SYMPATHIZERS, A CHARGE UPHELD BY THE COURTS.

BUT LEGAL VICTORIES ARE EXPENSIVE, AND IN RECENT YEARS THE TEXTILE WORKERS HAVE BEEN LOSING BOTH MONEY AND MEMBERS. IN LOOKING FOR HELP, THE UNION TURNED TO THE OLDER, LARGER AND BETTER FINANCED CLOTHING WORKERS, A CLOSE ALLY WHEN THE TEXTILE WORKERS WERE FORMED IN THE LATE NINETEEN THIRTIES.

TOGETHER, THE MERGED UNION WILL LOOK SOUTH WHERE AGAIN THE PRIME TARGET WILL BE J.P. STEVENS. THE REST OF ORGANIZED LABOR HAS ALREADY PROMISED TO BACK A NATION-WIDE BOYCOTT OF ALL STEVENS PRODUCTS. BUT THE COMPANY THAT YEARS AGO WENT SOUTH TO AVOID UNIONS AND SO FAR HAS KEPT THEM AWAY SEEMS UNLIKELY TO BEND WITHOUT A FIGHT. FOR A LABOR MOVEMENT WHOSE STRUGGLES FOR RECOGNITION FORTY YEARS AGO HAVE GIVEN WAY TO THE PEACEFUL PURSUIT OF HIGHER WAGES AND OTHER BENEFITS THROUGH COLLECTIVE BARGAINING, ANOTHER FIGHT SEEMS NOT FAR OFF.